

INFORMATION FOR BEEF FARMERS INTERESTED IN “BEEF FROM GRASS”

Thank you for your interest in becoming a “Beef from Grass” Pilot Farmer.

Background

In Northern Ireland grazed or ensiled grass remains the dominant forage source, occupying an estimated 93% of the total farmed area and with a natural climatic advantage for grass production it is important that we maximise the use of high quality pasture in our beef and sheep production systems. However, the current performance of managed grasslands remains sub-optimal with an estimated 4.1 tonnes of grass dry matter utilised per hectare on beef and sheep farms, significantly behind achievable levels.

The Sustainable Agricultural Land Management Strategy for Northern Ireland has called for an increase in the uptake of sward assessment and grass utilisation measurement on grassland farms as one measure by which improvements in grassland utilisation can be achieved. A recent study carried out by AFBI demonstrated that improving grassland utilisation by one tonne per hectare on a beef and sheep farm is worth an additional profit of £204/ha/year.

GrassCheck is AgriSearch’s longest running programme. The format has altered over the years, however, measurements have always been taken from grass plots at Greenmount and Hillsborough which are fed into a weekly report for the benefit of farmers. The results from GrassCheck were used as evidence for the 2002 weather aid and the 2013 fodder transport scheme.

The past 12 months has highlighted the wide variability in grass growing conditions present across Northern Ireland and it is important that this variation is monitored and understood. In addition GrassCheck has always been modelled on dairy farming systems.

A new “Beef from Grass” project jointly funded by DAERA and AgriSearch will begin in early 2017. One part of this large-scale project will see the recruitment of eighteen beef farms from across Northern Ireland to measure grass growth and quality across a range of production systems and land types. This work package aims to provide high quality grass growth and grass quality information from regions across Northern Ireland to assist farmers in making grass management decisions.

What we are looking for?

AgriSearch (in partnership with AFBI) are seeking to recruit eighteen beef farmers from across Northern Ireland (three per county) to participate in the study.

Farmers will be expected to measure their grazing platform on a weekly basis throughout the grazing season. Grass measurements will be fed into a online management platform (AgriNet) along with stock numbers and details of meal and silage fed to cattle.

Every fortnight each farm will submit grass samples to AFBI for analysis. This will be done on a rotating basis with half the farms submitting samples one week and the other half submitting on the following week.

Each farm will be equipped with a max/min thermometer and a rain gauge and asked to record these figures daily.

Each farm will be featured in the local press one or two times per year. Pilot farmers will be encouraged to use social media to promote their involvement in the study and their experiences measuring and managing grass. Following 2017, there will also be the opportunity for the pilot farms to engage with new AFBI activity on precision grassland management which aims to use novel technologies to measure grass growth on farm.

We will give preference to farmers who are in a CAFRE Business Development Group and would encourage pilot farms to host a meeting of their BDG during the year. Some of the pilot farmers may be asked to host a larger farm walk during the year.

While we are ideally looking for three farms per county if we are not able to recruit three farms from a county who meet the minimum criteria we reserve the right to alter this if it should prove necessary.

Next Steps

If you wish to apply, download an application form from the AgriSearch website and return via email to jason@agrisearch.org or by post to:

AgriSearch
Innovation Centre
Large Park
Hillsborough
County Down
BT26 6DR

Deadline

Applications forms must arrive no later than noon on Wednesday 4th January 2017.

Further Information

If you have any specific queries then contact either Jason Rankin (AgriSearch) on 028 9268 1613 or Francis Lively (AFBI) on 028 9268 1552

Project supported by:

